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ABSTRACT

This report assesses the relationship between teacher expectations and the achievement of black intermediate school students attending school in Fairfax County, Virginia, a relatively affluent part of the Washington, D.C., metropolitan Area. Information was culled from interviews with and observation of 46 black students, their peers, teachers, counselors, parents, and others. Findings indicate that the presence of a modified caste system prevents the majority of black students from crossing cultural boundaries and achieving academic success. Many of John Ogbu's findings in his Stockton study and subsequent research were corroborated in Fairfax: the teacher's perceptions of their black students were molded by their own cultural perceptions and historical experiences. The black students and their parents were generally viewed in terms of their birth-ascribed status rather than their achieved status. Teachers generally attributed the underachievement of their black students to cultural deprivation and lack of parental concern, and had limited knowledge and understanding of the back students and their families. Communication with parents rarely occurred before the student was having difficulty in school, due to the teachers' low expectations of parental interest and the tendency of black parents to avoid communication with the teacher. Recommendations to ease the black students' crossing of cultural barriers are offered. A table illustrates some of the data. A 69-item bibliography is included. (BJV)

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Teacher Expectations and Minority Achievements;

A Study of Black Students in Fairfax County

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper was to focus on teachers' expectations of the black students in an intermediate school in Fairfax County, Virginia. This study was part of a larger, ongoing investigation of the beliefs, values, and attitudes guiding the behavior of these students. The cultural factors investigated included the following: the academic performance of the students; the educational and occupational aspirations voiced by the students and their parents; the student behaviors displayed in and out of the school; the educational strategies devised by the students and their parents; and the expectations of student academic performance held by their teachers and counselors.

BACKGROUND

Problem

Some thirty years after the Supreme Court's Brown v. Board of Education decision to eliminate inequality in American public education, the academic achievement of black students continues to lag behind that of their white counterparts. The national results most recently reported by the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) and the National Assessment on Educational Progress reveal that the scores of black students are significally below those of the white students on verbal and mathematic tests and on reading. Discrepancies in science achievement have been reported by the Science Assessment and Research Project

of the University of Minnesota during its five-year investigation.

Similar differences in black and white student achievement have been found in Fairfax County, Virginia, a relatively affluent part of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. There, systemwide data was collected on standardized test scores, dropout rate, suspension rate, placement in special remedial and advanced programs, and on post-high school expectations. The analysis of the data led to the conclusion that the performance of black students was below that of white and Asian students on every indicator.

Theories to Account for Minority Achievement

Several theories to account for the low performance of minority students on standardized tests and other achievement indicators have been proposed. These explanations emphasize cultural deprivation or conflict, educational inequality, or genetic inferiority. All of these theories have been rejected as inadequate explanations of the poor performance of black students in Fairfax County.

The cultural deprivation theory, which provided the philosophical foundation for the federal compensatory education programs in the 1960's, stated that children from economically and/or culturally impoverished backgrounds lag behind in their linguistic, cognitive, and social

development and thus do poorly in school. Data on student achievement and school resources collected by Coleman and his associates (1966) led him to the conclusion that minority achievement is most closely associated with family background and socioeconomic status (SES) rather than school variables.

Researchers on effective schools (Gutherie, 1971; Edmonds and Frederickson, 1984; Jones and Spady, 1984; and Squiers, Huitt, and Segars, 1984) have challenged Coleman's view of the school as a passive conduit of poverty and suggest that he neglected some important practices affecting school achievement. The release of SAT scores by the CEEB indicate that SES factors alone do not explain the gap between black and white test scores; in 1982 black students from families with incomes over $50,000 scored 120 points less on SAT tests than white students in the same income group (Howard and Hammond, 1985). The differences have continued as the CEEB reports in its annual review of SAT scores.

Critics of the cultural deprivation theory (Valentine, 1969; Spradley, 1980) suggested that such an explanation itself was culturally biased. Erickson (1986) noted that the deficit explanation of school failure was particularly reprehensible due to its ethnocentrism being cloaked in the legitimacy of social science. Other researchers have found

that cultural differences do not automatically lead to conflict or school failure (Neisser, 1986)

Gibson's studies of the Punjabi Sikhs in California schools (1982 and 1987) indicated that those students managed to perform as well as their majority-group classmates, and better than other minorities, and maintain their cultural identity. Similarly, Suarez-Orozco (1987) in a study of Central American students found a strong belief in education as the key to a better future for themselves and their families. The findings of Gibson, Suarez-Orozco, Fordham, and Ogbu (1982) and Philips (1983) support Ogbu's thesis that differences in school performance among minority groups are not due to cultural differences, but to the ability of certain groups to develop a strategy of accomodation without assimilation.

Thus, the cultural deficiency/conflict theory was rejected generally on the basis that black students come from a group with strong cultural integrity, that cultural differences can exist without school failure, and SES factors alone cannot account for poor school performance. Specifically, in Fairfax County, the school system has mandated a human relations course for all teachers and administrators and a multi-cultural counseling program for its guidance personnel.

The educational inequality explanation was rejected

because of the strong commitment of the county's financial and human resources to its educational program, the per pupil expenditure of Fairfax County exceeds $4500. Schools with large numbers of students deemed "at risk" receive additional funding for instructional supplies and staff. School groups such as the PTA or booster groups must have all purchases for their local schools approved by the School Board so that schools in the more affluent communities do not have the advantage of superior instructional supplies over those in the less affluent areas. Forty-seven percent of the teachers hold advanced degrees, and many of the instructional programs developed by the county have received countrywide and international attention. The school system has initiated mastery reading programs, sponsored school organizations to improve minority academic achievement and personal coping skills, and set up special programs to identify and help high risk students.

The most controversial explanation for the poor performance of black minority students is that of genetic inferiority . This theory, elaborated by Jensen, has been criticized for its erroneous mathematics, faulty methodology, distortion of research results, and failure to seek alternate explanations (Hirsch, 1981; Ogbu, 1978; and Rabbit, 1985). Specifically there are no studies which would show that genes, controlling conceptual learning and abstract thinking are

found in higher proportion among whites than blacks. In a review of studies of intelligence tests Neisser (1986) notes that the relative difficulty of items for all groups being tested was affected by wording, by item length, by degree of visualization required, and by factual contents--but not by the amount of abstract thinking involved. Therefore, the theory of genetic inferiority was rejected for its questionable assumptions, presumptions, and interpretations.

Ogbu's Theory of Status Mobility

None of the above theories offers adequate and complete explanations for the poor performance of black students in school. Ogbu (1985) has suggested that the way education is perceived and responded to depends upon the economic niche of a particular group, their historical experience or anticipation in using education for personal, economic gain, and their evolved values and cultural frame of reference. That is, each group has its particular "folk theory" of success or status mobility which includes the type of behavior leading to success and the ideal, successful people or role models. When members of a group believe that one must do well in school in order to achieve social mobility, they will select strategies and model their behaviors after those that promote school success. Parents will encourage their children to adopt such behaviors, and the children will act in a manner conducive to academic success. If, however, children and parents do not perceive education as a necessary part of their status mobility system, their achievement motivation and behavior will reflect that view of educational irrelevance for them.

In his ethnographic study of the segregated school system of Stockton, California in the 1960's and 1970's Ogbu (1974) found that the limited occupational opportunities or job ceiling imposed upon black and Hispanic adults in the community were observed by the adolescents and apparently

affected their own educational and occupational aspirations. He also found that the school, through teacher and counselor expectations and instructional content and methods, limited the occupational opportunities available to students and perpetuated the low expectations-low performance cycle. Ogbu concluded that the structure of opportunities available in adult society strongly affect the qualities that schools transmit to their students and the qualities the students strive to possess.

In 1978 Ogbu expanded his status mobility theory to account for differences between "castelike", involuntary minorities, forcibly brought to a country, and freely immigrating minorities. Initially the caste minority has primary (real) differences in style and culture with the dominant group--differences which exist prior to contact between the two groups occurs, and the inferior political, economic, and ritual roles of the caste are defined and rationalized by the majority. Then, secondary cultural differences of style are developed by the caste minority as a way of coping with exploitation and domination. These secondary differences according to Ogbu (1987) are due to "cultural inversion" or the tendency of an involuntary minority to perceive certain forms of behavior, events, and symbols as belonging to the dominant majority. Members of the caste minority reject the behaviors of the white majority and develop their own

oppositional forms of behavior.

In school, for example, the caste minorities have problems crossing cultural boundaries because of their treatment by the schools and because of the way they respond to teaching and learning due to their oppositional frame of reference. Ogbu maintains that blacks, lacking a cultural frame of reference that encourages school success, experience "persistent mis-match in cognitive styles, communication styles, and interactional etiquettes." Even when blacks accept education as a part of their status mobility system, Ogbu has found that students divert their efforts into non-academic activities and fail to match aspirations with appropriate school behaviors.

In summary, alternate theories to account for the gap between black and white school performance have been proposed and rejected as adequate explanations. The purpose of this study was to determine if the values, attitudes, and beliefs characteristic of a caste minority, as defined by Ogbu, are exhibited in an affluent suburban school district; specifically, this paper is a report of the findings in regard to teacher expectations and perceptions of their black students.

METHODOLOGY

Population

Fairfax County, located in a 400-square mile area of Northern Virginia, is a part of the Washington, D. C. metropolitan area. Its 1985 population of 668,000 persons

consisted of 90% white and 10% black, Asian, Hispanic, and other ethnic groups. The occupational distribution of the work force is shown in Table 1. The district's 1985 school population of 125,516 students was distributed in 116 elementary schools (K-6), 19 intermediate schools (7-8), 20 high schools (9-12), 3 secondary schools (7-12), and 20 special education centers. During the 1984-85 school year 87.1% of the graduating seniors advanced to post-secondary education, and 2.1% of the students dropped out prior to graduation.

The school selected for the study had a population of 512 students of whom 60% were white, 14% were black, 7% were Hispanic, and 19% were Asian. The students generally fell within the mid-range of socio-economic status. In 1980 blacks in the district had a median income of $14,172 and a mean income of $14,113; whites had a median income of $18,762 and a mean of $23,650. School records on free or reduced-price lunches, which are given on the basis of financial need, indicate that the majority of those eligible for the program were foreign-born, primarily Asian, Afghan, and Hispanic. Approximately 16% of the black students in the school participated in the lunch program and constituted 15% of the students receiving free or reduced price lunches.

Employment in the various occupations by working

Table 1 Occupations of Blacks and Whites in Fairfax County

Type of Occupation	Percentage of each group in occupation	
	Whites	Blacks
Agriculture	.9	.9
Mining and forestry	.1	.1
Construction	6.1	5.6
Manufacturing	5.4	5.2
Transportation	3.6	5.9
Communication	2.6	3.9
Wholesale trade	2.5	1.7
Retail trade	13.8	13.1
Banking	2.9	2.9
Insurance	4.8	3.3
Business and repairs	8.7	8.9
Private households	.5	2.2
Personal services	1.9	2.7
Entertainment and recreation	1.0	.9
Professional and religious	22.3	23.0
Public administration	22.4	19.7
TOTALS	100.	100.

members of the school community reflected the occupational distribution of the county as a whole. School data indicated that 56% of the parents had some college training; 36% had ended their formal education with high school graduation; and 8% had not graduated from high school. Data collected from the black students indicated that these occupational and educational patterns were similar for black students also.

Slightly less than one-half of all students lived with both parents. Students lived in all forms of housing available in Northern Virginia: single family dwellings, high rise and garden apartments, townhouses, and condominiums. The student mobility rate for the school was relatively high at 19%--i.e. between the first and last day of school in 1986-87 19% of the students moved to another school.

Participants

Participants in the study were all of the black students of one of the smaller intermediate schools in Fairfax County, their peers, teachers, counselors, parents, and others significant in their lives. The 46 students participating in the study differed from each other in the categories of academic achievement, SES, documented classroom behaviors, and reported values and attitudes. Among those interviewed were the following

categories: those on the Honor Roll and those failing several subjects; those who received social services and economic assistance and those whose parents were economically affluent; those living with a single parent and those from intact families; those who "loved" school and those who "hated" it; those who were in frequent trouble in the office and those who were considered models of behavior by their teachers. Those who were popular with their classmates, for various reasons, participated, as well as those viewed as "ordinary kids" by their peers and teachers.

Instrumentation

Ethnographic methods were chosen for the study to enable the researcher to examine participants' motives, behaviors, and interactions in their own environments. By the end of the school year all of the 46 participants had been observed and/or interviewed. A list of specific interview questions was compiled on attitudes toward school and teachers, educational and career aspirations, parental and peer support, and academic strategies; other questions evolved from the interviews. Each interview lasted at least an hour, and certain students considered "key informants" were sought out for more information or classification. The researcher also interviewed the students' teachers, counselors, school administrators, and

school social worker; parents or significant others of ten of the students were interviewed at work or at school.

Students were observed formally in the classroom and informally in the school cafeteria and gymnasium, in the hallways, on the bus ramps, and in the sites for after-school activities. During the observations the researcher focused on student verbal and non-verbal communication patterns, academic strategies, learning styles, and involvement with academic and extra-curricular activities. The interactions between teachers and students were analyzed for clues to implicit and explicit expectations of student academic achievement. School records and interview responses were used to obtain additional information on student behaviors.

Other documents and records with information relevant to the study included the school yearbook and newspaper, morning announcements over the public address system, official school reports to the superintendent, and daily attendance reports. Additional information on academic performance was obtained from reports prepared by the guidance staff and reading teachers.

The researcher attempted to record the participants' words as accurately as possible and to record their actions and interactions within the setting in objective terms, so that inferences could be freely drawn by other

researchers. Other participants and data sources were used to confirm the researcher's own perceptions. The patterns which emerged from the data analysis are reported in the following section.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Black Student Academic Performance

The academic achievement of black students at Lowell Intermediate School, where the study was conducted, lagged behind that of their white counterparts, as it did in Fairfax County and throughout the nation. The black students scored considerably lower (19 to 24 percentile points) on the standardized SRA tests given in the eighth grade than the white students. A survey of semester grades indicated that black students who represented 14% of the student population constituted 28% of those receiving D's and F's and 4% of those getting A's and B's. They were underrepresented in the Gifted/Talented Program (4% of total) and overrepresented in the Special Education Program (81%). No blacks were enrolled in the eighth grade algebra or advanced English classes.

When asked to account for the discrepancy in black and white achievement, the answers given by the students, teachers, and parents varied widely, as did the academic strategies employed by the students and the support given by their families. The teachers attributed the

generally low academic achievement of black students to lack of parental concern, low socio-economic status, or cultural deprivation. These attitudes and perceptions evolved over a period of time as the school population changed and the percentage of black students increased.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Black Student Culture

During the thirty-year period following World War II Fairfax County underwent a period of rapid population growth and economic development. It was transformed from a sleepy agricultural county into a thriving suburban area for federal government workers and military personnel and a center for its own highly technical industry. To accommodate the growing number of school-age children the county built new schools at a fast rate; during the 1960's county planners boasted that a "new classroom opens every day in Fairfax County" (Reston Times 1975). Lowell Intermediate School was designed in 1966 to accomodate approximately 1600 seventh and eighth graders in a six-square mile area near the center of Fairfax County. The population served by Lowell Intermediate was composed of mostly white students from middle to upper class neighborhoods and a small group of black students. Two years prior to the opening of the school, the desegregation of Fairfax County schools had been ordered by the U. S. District Court. Many of the teachers at the school had no experience teaching black students or working with black colleagues. During the 1986-87 school year three blacks were on the Lowell staff: two teachers

and one counselor.

In 1974 the school reached its maximum enrollment of 1600 students. Later on, as new schools were built, the school boundaries were redrawn, and students from the affluent neighborhoods of Devonshire and Avondale started attending other schools. Many of the families living in the area adjacent to the school saw their children graduate from the public schools and had no immediate, personal interest in the public school system--the situation for 51% of the family units in Fairfax County. Meanwhile, townhouses, high rise apartment buildings, and garden apartments were built on vacant lands or on formerly single family dwellings, attracted a wide variety of tenants and buyers. They included immigrant families, especially Orientals, Hispanics, and Afghans; professionals in the government, military or private sector, seeking mobility; and a few members of the working poor with subsidized housing.

Those teachers who were associated with Lowell since its opening attributed a decline in student performance to a change in student population and family support for education. The math teacher described his perception of his black students' family backgrounds:

> What do you expect of kids who grow up in these homes where there are no books, no magazines, no newspapers? They spend all their time watching TV ... they just don't care about getting an education.

That teacher's perception of black students living in culturally-deprived homes, devoid of any "worthwhile" reading matter, was shared by other Lowell teachers. Research into the reading habits and preferences of Lowell students indicated, however, that such stereotypical perceptions had little basis in reality. A recent survey on reading patterns of Lowell students indicated no significant differences in the responses of its black and white students. In an attempt to determine the magazines and newspapers which could be used by students for homework assignments, one teacher discovered that 90% of her students had a daily newspaper and/or magazine subscriptions. Nearly all of the black households received the Washington Post or the Fairfax Journal, and many of them subscribed to a news magazine (Time or Newsweek). Also, students reported reading a variety of magazines such as Ebony, Jet, and Essence, targeted to a black audience in addition to magazines devoted to

sports, fashion, and teenage interests.

Teacher Perceptions of Black Families

The dual themes of cultural deprivation and lack of parental concern occurred repeatedly in the analysis of student failure and underachievement made by the teachers. The teachers at Lowell, like those observed by Ogbu, believed that they were primarily responsible for the education of Lowell students and expected parents to seek their help and follow their suggestions. When questioned about parental involvement, the teachers indicated that they expected parents to make a phone call, write a note, or request a conference as evidence of their concern about their child's academic progress. Failure by the parents to take any of these steps was seen by the teachers as evidence of lack of parental interest.

One teacher expressed her exasperation with the lack of parental interest when she described Wendall, a black seventh grader who was failing her English class: "His parents just don't care. I keep sending those F-interims [interim quarterly reports] home, and I haven't gotten any response from his parents."

When Wendall's mother was questioned, she described her reluctance to contact his teacher:

> I know Wendall and his English teacher don't get along ... but I tell him, you've got to

> learn to get along with your teachers. When I was in high school, I had a teacher [black] who didn't like anybody in my family ... she gave my brothers and sisters a fit, but I worked so hard in that class, she had to give me an A. I told Wendall, you can't let a teacher get you down ... but I don't know if talking with her will do any good --- maybe I will though.

Later, Wendall's English teacher said she was "amazed" when Wendall's mother called to request a conference: "She really sounded nice on the telephone--very well-spoken and intelligent."

Elaine's social studies teacher was impressed with Elaine's parents: "They're really involved in school and will give the teacher all kinds of support." This involvement was also deemed worthy of comment by Elaine's sixth grade teacher on her report card notation: "Elaine continues to be interested and enthusiastic ... your continued home support has been a big influence in her success this year."

The teacher in the Learning Disabled Self-Contained (LDSC) program worked closely with parents in developing the Individualized Educational Prescriptions (IEPs) mandated by federal regulation. A majority of the students,

11 of 16, in the LDSC program were black. In describing the students in her program, she commented:

> This year is the first year I've gotten any real support from the parents ... Usually the school ends up owning the problem. This year, for the first time I have some parents who place a priority on education ... still a majority of the parents fail to commit the time, energy, and money to support the needs of special kids.

The guidance director cited the lack of adequate home support in her analysis of the overrepresentation of black students in LDSC and LD Resource (LDR) programs. In order to qualify for a special educational program such as LDR or LDSC the student's test results must show a significant discrepancy between achievement potential and measured content knowledge and skill development--i.e. a difference between achievement goals and realities. She suggested:

> Many students have these discrepancies--they just learn to compensate for them by getting a lot of help from home. The black students don't get this help at home, so they get placed in LD programs.

A survey of student records indicated that teachers did not always welcome parent involvement, however, especially when it conflicted with their own educational

judgements. Angela's experience in the sixth grade was an example of the teacher's sense of certainty and patronizing attitude toward the parents, described as "clientage mentality" by Ogbu.

Described as a capable and conscientious seventh grader, Angela, according to her records, had experienced some "difficulty in keeping up" in the sixth grade. Angela's mother recalled that she and Angela's teacher agreed to determine Angela's status--as a rising seventh grader or sixth grade repeater--before the end of the school year. Two weeks before the end of school, however, Angela's teacher told her she would be repeating the sixth grade. Angela's mother recalled her feelings and actions:

> I was furious! We had an agreement, and that woman [the teacher] ignored it! I sent her a letter, that I typed at work, recounting the procedure that we had agreed on and asking why she had ignored our agreement. I didn't want Angela to fail; she was a big girl. I wanted to get a tutor for her, and I requested the names of all the books she'd been using. I sent a copy of the letter to the principal. Finally the teacher sent me a list of all the things Angela needed help with, and I got a

> tutor for the summer, and she moved on to seventh grade. But that whole thing [incident] showed me that you have to fight to get what you want ... you can't just let the school tell you what to do.

The school area (division) social worker suggested that "teachers should call parents before the kid is in trouble. If they [the teachers] wait until it's too late, parents get defensive and hostile. They don't want teachers to tell them what they're doing wrong at home."

Other parents expressed their interest in being informed about their child's school progress and their belief that parents had the most concern about students and that the school could not always be trusted to act in behalf of the student's best interest.

In contrast, conversations with teachers about the black students at Lowell reflected the belief that black parents frequently made the wrong choices for their children and had priorities counter to those of the teachers. The math teacher announced that Lamondo just lost his second math book:

> When I told him he'd have to pay for it, he said, "My mama told me she wasn't going to buy any more math books after the first [one]

one"? I said, "Well, Lonnette, you'll just have to quit wearing those $49 Adidas [shoes] you've been sporting"?

The other teachers present agreed that Lonnette and his friends were well dressed--with expensive sneakers and the latest in teenager fashions; they could not "imagine" where their parents got the money for those outfits.

Student conversation indicated, however, that careful shopping was a source of pride and accomplishment. One Monday morning three black girls were discussing their weekend activities. Elena told her friends, Kyndra and Maria, that her mother gave her $50 to go shopping on the previous Saturday. She told them how she took the bus to Landmark Shopping Mall and went to Sears, Hechts, and Woodies (all department stores in the Mall) to look at things. Then she went back and bought a skirt, a blouse, a top, and some hose. She even had enough money to take a taxi home. Her friends were enthusiastic: "You did good, girl--you did real good to get all that for $50."

A recurring lunch time conversational topic in the teachers' room was that of the welfare mother. One teacher lamented the situation of "the [black] welfare mothers who won't work and keep on having children that I have to pay for." Another teacher warned the group

that "we'll all be paying for the next generation if we don't teach them to do something so they can get a job."

A search of occupational status through school records and interviews with students and staff members confirmed, however, the existence of only two "welfare mothers" who did not work and received assistance through the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). The social worker affirmed that the parents of the black students work--many at two jobs--so that they can live in Fairfax County and send their children to school in the district. He noted: "It takes a lot of money to live in Fairfax County when a one bedroom apartment goes for $500 a month." Those Lowell families which were headed by a working mother tended to have lower family incomes than two-parent families or those headed by working fathers. Some of the families qualified for food stamps, subsidized housing, or free or reduced-price school lunches.

The families at the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum were considered noteworthy by the teachers. They described different students with comments such as, "Michelle comes from a very affluent family--her father owns a fuel oil company"; "Brent's family owns a beautiful single family house in Ravensworth"; Arthur's dad owns his own company"; "Allison's parents are both doctors." Most teachers, however, seemed to be unaware of the

occupational level of the black students' parents; they assumed that most of them were on a lower socioeconomic level.

Teacher Expectations of Black Academic Achievement

After the issue of the school system's report on minority education and programs in 1984 the board directed school officials to develop policies to promote black and Hispanic academic achievement. One strategy selected by the school system was a course designed to raise teacher expectations and thus promote student achievement. Several of the Lowell staff members took the course during the 1985-86 school year. All of the teachers were told, in general faculty meetings and in content area meetings, of the thrust to promote student achievement through higher teacher expectations.

When questioned about their own expectations, most Lowell teachers insisted that they had the highest expectations for all of their students. Interviews, conversations, and observations indicated, however, that the teachers' expectations were influenced by their perceptions of black culture frequently stereotypical in nature and that teachers were often unaware of the nature of their own perceptions and expectations of black students.

An example of the rigorous defense of teacher expectations occurred at a meeting of the school team,

comprised of the principal, three teachers, a counselor, and a parent--all white. There the issue of minority achievement was raised and one of the teachers responded firmly:

> I don't understand this business of teachers' not having high expectations. I'm always telling my black students they can do better. I keep after Tyrell and Lamonde and Kyndria all of the time to work harder and get better grades.

Another teacher interjected:

> I'm not sure it's that simple--just to tell students to do better. I suspect we have to do more ... and, as far as our expectations are concerned, I suspect that we do have lower expectations of our black students, based on our prior experience. If you've taught for some time and had very few black students who could perform as well as white students, I think you'd come to expect less of your black students. I just think that's human nature.

The group fell silent after her comments, and she said later that she wasn't sure if they agreed or not--"at any rate, they didn't disagree."

During an interview with a young male teacher, he

stated flatly:

> It doesn't do much good to talk about raising teacher expectations when we have teachers who call them "niggers" in private! I hate that ... it makes me furious! My best friend in high school was black ... when people looked at us, they couldn't tell who was black and who was white, we were so much alike. When people use that term, I just walk away!

Another teacher described the perceptions and expectations of blacks that some of her colleagues revealed to her:

> When I first came to Lowell I heard a few teachers using the term 'nigger' in the teachers' room and they told rascist jokes openly. Then I noticed they stopped saying 'nigger' and told their jokes very quietly to their friends or those people who would appreciate them ... now it's been a couple of years since I've heard them do either one. It's interesting, though ... sometimes I still hear teachers say things like, "Well, the black kids call each other 'nigger'," as if that made it all right ... I believe if you refer to a black kid as a 'nigger'--even if he doesn't hear it, he knows you feel that way inside.

The researcher never heard the term 'nigger' used by any staff member but was told an "AIDS joke" in which two blacks from D.C. were the hapless victims. The terms "us" and "them", however, surfaced frequently in conversations. One day, early in the school year, an interchange was observed between a black eighth grade boy and the school finance secretary. Edward would not be able to get his books until he paid a fine from the previous year. When Edward protested that he had paid the fine, the secretary told him he would have to produce the receipt or pay the fine. As they talked, the secretary's voice grew louder, and Edward's grew softer. Finally, Edward walked out, and the finance secretary confided, "You've got to watch them every second, or they'll take advantage of you. Give them an inch, and they'll take a mile."

Subsequently Edward's social studies teacher offered to pay for the book. She was sure that Edward had paid for the book, but she was not sure that she (the teacher) had given him the receipt the previous school year. Two days later, Edward's mother found her cancelled check, and Edward got his textbooks for all of his classes. Some of his teachers had already given him his books, despite school policy prohibiting the issuance of books to students with unpaid fines. One teacher suggested, "What good

does it do for a kid to sit in class without books? Besides, Edward's a nice kid, and I trust him anyway."

On occasion teachers' remarks seem to reflect their own ambiguous feelings toward their black students and their expectations for them. One day in the teachers' room during lunch, the math and social studies teachers were discussing Mary and Richard, both straight A students. Mary, born of Ethiopian parents, described herself as black, as did Richard, the son of black-white parents. After discussing the outstanding work of the two students, one teacher said, very quietly to the other, "You know they both call themselves blacks ... and I don't know why. They could pass for whites or foreigners." The other teacher responded, "No, I didn't understand it either." The unspoken implication was: why would anyone call him/herself a black when he/she could pass for white?

One frequently-voiced teacher expectation was that some of the students at Lowell--black and white--would turn out badly--i.e. ending up incarcerated or killed. Teachers who had seen such fates befall their students were more likely to have this expectation. During an observation of students in the cafeteria the researcher asked one of the teachers on cafeteria duty about the students--mostly black and Hispanic--sitting at his table. His response was, "These kids aren't motivated ... some

of them will end up in jail. I've seen it happen too often."

The teachers at Lowell had relatively little contact with black parents and consequently, little knowledge of the families and home lives of their black students. They generally assumed that they, the teachers, knew what educational program was best for their students. Parents were generally believed to be disinterested and uninvolved in the educational experiences of their children or incapable of making appropriate educational decisions for them. Black parents were rarely contacted until the student was in serious trouble--for disciplinary or academic reasons. Most teachers seemed to have limited educational expectations--mostly implicitly expressed--for their black students. In their interaction with their black students, the teachers focused on the few successful students who opted for active involvement with the academic process and the other few who sought disengagement with academic matters. The third group--the majority of black students who selected neutral coping strategies received comparatively little teacher expectation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from this study indicate the presence of a modified caste system which prevents the majority of black students from crossing cultural boundaries and achieving academic success. Many of Ogbu's findings in his Stockton study and subsequent research were corroborated in Fairfax including the expectations and perceptions of the teachers.

The data suggests that the teachers' perceptions of their black students were molded by their own cultural perspectives and historical experiences. The black students and their parents were generally viewed in terms of the birth-ascribed status, as opposed to their achieved status, which supported the theory of a caste minority in Fairfax. Teachers generally attributed the underachievement of their black students to cultural deprivation and lack of parental concern. Convinced of their own expertise, Fairfax teachers exhibited the same patronizing attitude toward students as the Stockton teachers observed by Ogbu. They had limited knowledge and understanding of the black students and their families. Communication with parents rarely occurred before the student was having difficulty in school, due to the teachers' low expectations of parental interest and the tendency of black parents to avoid communication with the

teacher. Consequently, when communications occurred, it was often marred by feelings of mistrust by both parents and teachers.

Specific researcher recommendations to ease the black students' crossing of cultural barriers at Lowell include the following: establishment of peer counseling groups for students; expanding the career education program with the introduction of black role models; setting up a black parent support group; initiating a small-scale teacher-advisor program; and presenting inservice activities for teachers.

Teachers must be aware of the impact of their cultural perspective upon their perceptions of their black students and their interactions with them. Their ideas about culturally impoverished black youth and disinterested parents at Lowell need to be replaced by a realistic understanding of black students and their culture. This could be achieved by inservice programs to heighten teacher awareness and sensitivity and by increased communication with parents and the guidance staff. The administration should provide teachers with opportunities to relinquish the patron-client relationship with parents and develop a new relationship of joint responsibility for educational experiences for students.

Additional research on the impact of teacher expectations

upon student academic performance needs to be done. Brophy (1983) suggests that it is difficult to predict the effects of expectations because teacher behavior is also determined by belief about learning and instruction and because students differ in their response to teacher behavior. Other researchers (Guskey, 1982; Good, 1982) have found that increasing the effectiveness of teachers through instructional practices raises their expectations and student outcomes. Therefore, one component of inservice training for teachers could focus on strategies to increase teaching effectiveness in general with the goal of improving student achievement.

Fairfax County is to be commended for its recognition of the problem posed to society when a sizeable minority of the population fails to develop its full potential. One way to address the problem of minority underachievement is to become familiar with the students who constitute the minority, to know their families and friends, to listen to their dreams, their hopes, and fears. Black people in the United States have a great respect for education, as evidenced by their long efforts in the courts to gain access to equal education. Those people who are concerned about the education of all of America's children must not lose sight of that black reverence for education and use it to develop the human potential of all Americans.

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